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THE PONTE MOLLE ASSOCIATION. THE EXAMINATION.

Drawn by LANG. Engraved by ROBBETT & EDMONDS.

he had been taught to see them, except by the God who made both him and them."

We conclude our extracts with some remarks upon composition and the mistake of over-working, into which the author's friends, the Pre-Raphaelites, have fallen.

If a man can compose at all, he can compose at once, or rather he must compose in spite of himself. And this is the reason of that silence which I have kept, in most of my works, on the subject of Composition. Many critics, especially the architects, have found fault with me for not "teaching people how to arrange masses;" for not "attributing sufficient importance to composition." Alas! I attribute far more importance to it than they do;—so much importance, that I should just as soon think of sitting down to teach a man how to write a *Divina Commedia*, or *King Lear*, as how to "compose," in the true sense, a single building or picture. The marvellous stupidity of this age of lecturers is, that they do not see that what they call, "principles of composition," are mere principles of common sense in every thing, as well as in pictures and buildings;—A picture is to have a principal light? Yes; and so a dinner is to have a principal dish, and an oration a principal point, and an air of music a principal note, and every man a principal object. A picture is to have harmony of relation among its parts? Yes; and

so is a speech well uttered, and an action well ordered, and a company well chosen, and a ragout well mixed. Composition! As if a man were not composing every moment of his life, well or ill, and would not do it instinctively in his picture as well as elsewhere, if he could. Composition of this lower or common kind is of exactly the same importance in a picture that it is in any thing else,—no more. It is well that a man should say what he has to say in good order and sequence, but the main thing is to say it truly. And yet we go on preaching to our pupils as if to have a principal light was every thing, and so cover our academy walls with *Shabacab* feasts, wherein the courses are indeed well ordered but the dishes empty.

It is not, however, only in invention that men over-work themselves but in execution also; and here I have a word to say to the Pre-Raphaelites specially. They are working too hard. There is evidence in failing portions of their pictures, showing that they have wrought so long upon them that their very sight has failed for weariness, and that the hand refused any more to obey the heart. And, besides this, there are certain qualities of drawing which they miss from over-carefulness. For, let them be assured, there is a great truth lurking in that common desire of men to see things done in what they call a "masterly," or "bold," or "broad," manner: a truth oppressed and abused, like almost every other in this world, but an eternal one nevertheless; and whatever mischief may have followed from

men's looking for nothing else but this facility of execution, and supposing that a picture was assuredly all right if only it were done with broad dashes of the brush, still the truth remains the same:—that because it is not intended that men shall torment or weary themselves with any earthly labor, it is appointed that the noblest results should only be attainable by a certain ease and decision of manipulation. I only wish people understood this much of sculpture, as well as of painting, and could see that the finely finished statue is, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, a far more vulgar work than that which shows rough signs of the right hand laid to the workman's hammer: but at all events, in painting it is felt by all men, and justly felt. The freedom of the lines of nature can only be represented by a similar freedom in the hand that follows them; there are curves in the flow of the hair, and in the form of the features, and in the muscular outline of the body, which can in no wise be caught but by a sympathetic freedom in the stroke of the pencil. I do not care what example is taken, be it the most subtle and careful work of Leonardo himself, there will be found a play and power and ease in the outlines, which no *slow* effort could ever imitate. And if the Pre-Raphaelites do not understand how this kind of power, in its highest perfection, may be united with the most severe rendering of all other orders of truth, and especially of those with which they themselves have most sympathy, let them look at the drawings of John Lewis.



THE PONTE MOLLE ASSOCIATION; THE PROCESSION.

Drawn by LANG. Engraved by BOBBETT & EDMONDS

THE ARTISTS' PONTE MOLLE ASSOCIATION IN ROME.

BY LOUIS LANG.

The Ponte Molle is a bridge which crosses the Tiber three miles north of Rome. It may well retain its place in the memory of every traveller, for its picturesque arches adorned with figures of white marble which stand upon lofty pedestals against the brilliant relief of an azure sky, inform him that he has at length arrived in the midst of the famous Campagna di Roma. Hardly has he passed the yellow Tiber when he sees the reality of a vision that had long been cherished by his imagination. Beside him are broken arches and prostrate columns, while in the distance rises St. Peter's with an array of lesser towers and cupolas. Soon after he reaches the Piazza del Popolo and is really in Rome—"the lone mother of dead empires."

This is the route by which the young German artists, who have year after year for the last half century pursued their studies in this city, enter its venerable streets. Times have sadly changed since they first resorted hither in any considerable numbers—sadly, at any rate, in the eyes of those who love to see poetry in every step they tread upon Italian ground. Railways, steamboats, telegraphs, and a host of modern improvements, deprive the traveller now of his pow-

er of quiet contemplation. But in those days there were no such means of communication. Alone, on foot, and with a knapsack at his back, many a young artist descended the sunny Gothard and passed along the beautiful shores of the Maggiore and of Como. The wars of the French revolution had but just terminated, and the roads were infested by banditti, who might easily have robbed him of his entire means of subsistence. But in spite of these dangers and his loneliness in a strange land, he moved on with a glowing heart. He saw a sky above him that defied all the skill and vigor of his palette; around him nature smiled in Eden-like beauty. He had passed from snowy regions into what seemed a perpetual summer. At Milan he saw for the first time the grandeur of Italian Art, and bowed in admiration before the *Duomo* and the *Last Supper* of Da Vinci. He sojourned for a while in Florence, Pisa and Perugia, and at last crossing the Ponte Molle, entered Rome, his body worn out with fatigue, but his heart invigorated and his imagination enlivened by the varied emotions of the journey.

Once again the loneliness of his situation oppressed his soul. He measured the long distance that divided him from his family and all the delights of his frugal though cherished home. He felt as if he were separated from

them forever; for in those days, as has been remarked, the communication between Italy and other countries was much less frequent than now, and a poor artist had but little claim on the kindness of the *vetturini* to transport him back to Germany. But this home-sickness soon wore off. Nowhere did more kindly feelings prevail than in those days among the artists of Rome. Severed from family ties, living together in a great city where the manners, customs and language were entirely different from their own, the jovial spirits of these young men soon converted the strange scenes around them into a most delightful and picturesque home.

The German artists have always been the most numerous at Rome. There were at one time not less than three hundred, including painters, sculptors, architects, archæologists, musicians and poets. Such a large body, with natural taste and love for social amusements and picturesque conceptions, would readily find means to establish a brotherhood, and we may here mention that the first German club was founded at the time when Winkelmann, Goethe, Herder, Raphael Mengs and Angelica Kaufman, were prominent lights in Rome. Their hours of recreation, of wit and song, were spent in a subterranean restaurant heavily vaulted and sparingly lighted among the ruins of the Thea-

tre of Marcellus. Here it was that Goethe loved to resort with his friends, and the place, although it has since been converted into a different sort of establishment, is still known by the artists as "Goethe's Kneipe"—Goethe's Rendezvous.

Some time after his day a more systematic association was formed among the German artists called *The Ponte Molle*, which in its plan entirely excluded politics, but made ample provision for mirth, wit, caricature, sketching, music, dramatic performances, and whatever might be productive of amusement to the members around their merry *Cena* table. The simple statutes of the body required that each candidate for membership should be subject to an examination, to be conducted by the presiding officer in the presence of all the associates. He was afterwards to receive the honor of knighthood and the decoration of a "mezzo bajocco" (a copper coin corresponding to an American half-cent) with the words "Ponte Molle" stamped on it. For this he was obliged to pay the so called "toll" across the Ponte Molle—that is—the wine bill of the evening.

Every year the Ponte Molle society became more and more popular as a resort for all foreign artists. Its meetings were holden in an old Palazzo called the "Fiano," which at that time was leased to a restaurateur who furnished wine and meals. The saloon of this Palazzo was an immense hall, with vaulted ceiling blackened by smoke and age, and profusely decorated with chalk sketches of various subjects. The throng of candidates made it necessary to fix a certain day every fortnight for the initiation. The most attractive features of this ceremony were, the examination and knighting of the new chevalier, the procession and the songs. The society having art and artistic jollification for its objects, it was proper that the cleverest members in these respects should be chosen for President and other officers—such qualifications it was not difficult to find. Among the most prominent of this class was Mr. NEARLY, who is never to be forgotten in the history of artist life in Rome. His wit and zeal could not be surpassed. He was the life and soul of every social gathering.

Even the older and more retired artists could not resist these attractions, and frequently graced the merry company with their presence. THORWALDSEN, FOGELBERG and PAPA REINHARDT, were often parties to these festivities.

The examination was perhaps the most trying of all the ceremonies to the novice. No matter how courageous might be the youth, he was sure to falter when his name was demanded. The President arrayed in grotesque costume, looking more wise and serene than Solomon, was seated in a lofty chair attended by his Herald and Secretary, while the new victim was led before him followed by a human figure dressed in napkins and called the "wet nurse." After a general hurrah and laughter a deadly silence followed, during which the old members gathered about to witness the torments to which the candidate was to be subjected. His name, country, age and size being duly heralded with much unnecessary noise through a huge papier maché trumpet, he was taken to a black-board and directed to draw upon it off-hand a composition upon a given subject. This sketch, if executed with skill and humor, made the new

member at once a favorite, for it was readily seen that a man must possess decided talent, who, in the midst of the President's bombastic harangues and most ridiculous and contradictory arguments about rules of composition, &c., (uttered on purpose to distract and bewilder him,) could coolly embody in chalk some witty allegory or absurd problem. The subject being sketched, (often with deep sighs and much cold perspiration on the part of the novice,) the President examined the work, professed the greatest astonishment, and announced through his Herald that the artist was the wonder of the world, all which was received with thunders of applause and rattling of bottles and glasses. The wet nurse was then put into requisition to examine into the physical and moral qualities of the young man. Alas for him if his rosy cheeks had never felt a razor! The nurse remonstrated vigorously against the election. This difficulty being adjusted, the candidate on his knees received the honor of knighthood, and was then adorned with a new half-bajocco suspended to a green silk ribbon. Let us say, by the way, that this mock decoration became celebrated through THORWALDSEN. On a certain occasion when summoned to court he did not hesitate to wear, instead of other orders that he had received at different times from crowned heads, this simple little coin, saying jokingly it was the only legitimate decoration he could wear as an artist.

The next ceremony was the procession, which was formed by all the members present carrying burning tapers in their hands with their heads covered with napkins. The President was either borne in a chair or he led the new member on his arm, the rest following on wherever he might march, over chairs, or tables or any other incumbrance, and the whole party singing in solemn strains the favorite old song "Prince Eugene, the courageous knight," &c. This procession was most droll and grotesque in its sham melancholy, and a stranger would have been at a loss to know to what congregation the illuminated mourners belonged.

The President having once more taken his seat, a large figured earthen goblet was presented to him, out of which he drank the health of the new associate, to whom the goblet was afterwards passed, and whose duty it was to drink brotherhood with every member present. Thanks to the inoffensive nature of the Roman vine, this was not so dangerous a task as it might at first seem to have been. However, the sweet nectar occasionally found its victim.

In course of time the right of membership in the Ponte Molle was extended to amateurs and friends of the artists. Among them was the Ex-King Louis of Bavaria, who desired to be made a chevalier much to the embarrassment of many of the old companions of the order, who did not exactly know how far in his case the joke could be carried. The sight was certainly an uncommon one, but gratifying to every member, who could not help loving the old King, the reviver of the fine arts, who became as it were one of them, exchanging joke for joke and entering into the spirit of their enjoyment with grace and a good heart.

To the regret of every veteran artist in Rome this society has lately undergone a thorough change and now has a different constitution. It has surrendered its ancient fun and jollity to

modern "improvements" and sobriety. In the place of the old blackened walls, which still testify in their chalk decorations to the humor and skill of a past generation, the modern artist enters a gilded and frescoed palace filled with books and newspapers. Instead of enjoying a merry chat, he knits his brows over the political news of the day. He passes his leisure in reading about the Daguerreotype and California. Only now and then does the ancient fun and jollity find an echo in these days. There is an occasional masked ball or concert enriched with gas lights and every luxury—but with all the brightness and beauty of these scenes, there was something in the *chiaro-scuro* of that old vaulted chamber, with the antique Roman lamp that graced the merry table, much more poetic and which will linger much longer and be much more warmly cherished in our memories.

GREAT PICTURES IN PROSPECT AND RETROSPECT.

The inexperienced lover of art, who loves art without having seen any of its great works, simply as the result of culture and a taste refined by education and high sensibilities, dreams of the master-pieces of painting and sculpture, with the same vague longing with which the lover of adventure dreams of "the Alps and Apennines, the Pyrenean and the river Po." Raphael, and Michael Angelo, and Titian, and all the great masters of the golden age of art, are with him objects of a reverence profound but undefined, and both themselves and their works subjects of simple faith, whom, having not seen, he loves. To such a person the great capabilities of art, and the actual achievements of artists, are matters of history which he believes because they are authenticated, and which he can appreciate because his sensibilities respond to the recorded facts. He reads in books of Raphael and his Transfiguration, and Leonardo da Vinci and his Last Supper, just as he reads of Apelles or Zeuxis, and their counterfeit presentments of nature ages before, just as he reads of the cunning gravers who devised the cherubim for the ark, and wrought in all manner of work for the tabernacle in the wilderness. The romance of the annals of art is to him a chosen and separate field of delight. The chronicles of its rise and progress, from the days when the Byzantine pioneers and missionaries of art brought its dawning light from the western empire to old classic Italy, and there revived it into a new and splendid youth, until its noonday glory irradiated all Europe; the history of its decline and fall, rapid and certain from that melancholy Good Friday when Raphael breathed his last, surrounded by his pupils, with the Transfiguration hanging unfinished on the wall, through the mournful decadence that followed, a twilight of inferior artists and imitators, thickening into dark night again; all these are as interesting and as instructive as the records of empires and dynasties. The student of them may become versed not only in the facts, but the philosophy of art. He may learn the reason of that marvellous revival of painting which sprang from the bosom of the church, drew its life and energy from her inspiration, and expired with the first waning of her power. He may never have walked in the Vatican, or lifted his eyes to the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, and yet, if he choose, may have mastered the secret of both, and know the source and spring of their immortal fame.